

Why the Bene Israel community was able to survive as a communal entity in India while practicing Biblical Judaism ? (pre and first Temple)

In the following paragraphs it is intended to review the reasons as to why the Bene Israel were able to survive for such a long period as an entity in a strange land and surrounded by Hindus and Muslims and other religions. The referred period being: from the time of their arrival in India, to the time of their supposed discovery, by fellow Jews (from elsewhere) and Christian missionaries. What miracle of fate assisted their forefathers in retaining and remembering their ancestral and traditional rituals and customs and the Shema and keep the flame of Judaism alive in their children from generation to generation (for nearly 2000 years) and not be assimilated among the Hindus, Muslims or Christians. To determinedly await, the arrival of emissaries and teachers who would re-educate, update and reincorporate them into mainstream Judaism. Upon re-exposure to mainstream Judaism the Bene Israel fervently and determinedly went about establishing synagogues fully equipped with all the objects of ritual worship. Between the time of re-exposure to modern times this small community succeeded in establishing nearly forty synagogues and prayer halls in British India and have continued to establish more than twenty-five synagogues (rough estimate only) in Israel and several more in USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere. This for a community that traditionally is believed to have originated from seven couples and to have numbered no more than 35,000 at its peak in the 1950s in India and where the total world population today is say 90,000 appears to be quite a significant contribution to the promotion and sustenance of the Jewish way of life.

Why, even though many Hindu and Jewish customs are so similar, did the Bene Israel shun Hinduism? Why, even though they practiced circumcision and had kosher practices (which have similarity to Islamic dietary laws) and even sometimes buried their dead in Muslim cemeteries (due to the lack of Jewish cemeteries in rural areas) and worked in the employment of Muslim and Hindu kings, and later in Christian British India did the Bene Israel not adopt any of these religions? How did this happen? Finally, this all happened in a time where in most of the world there was no spiritual or socio-economic reason to be Jewish. In fact it would have made more sense and provided a much greater amount of communal security and economic sense to be assimilated into the surrounding population.

Many Jewish communities had a hard time surviving in other countries and amongst people of other cultures, even with the development of extensive Jewish literature, liturgy, synagogues, etc. This was in spite of the fact that the people of those countries, cultures and religions had customs, traditions, and a civilization, with values that could be sourced to the Jewish religion. It should

be highlighted here that in the period between 1750 and 1950 when Jews in most Western countries were being assimilated into Christianity the Bene Israel were fervently and zealously establishing synagogues and refusing the overtures of the Christian missionaries in India. The author would like to draw the attention of the reader to some unique achievements of the Bene Israel community. A Catholic college like St. Xavier's in Bombay had a chair for Jewish Studies headed by reputed Bene Israel personalities like Prof. Ezekiel Moses, Prof. Ezekiel Talkar, Prof. Herman Malekar, Prof J.D. Aaron and others. The Founder Principal of Wilson College was the reputed Reverend Dr. John Wilson who was very active in the revival of the Bene Israel as a vibrant Jewish community and translated Hebrew books, the Bible and prayer books, hymns and religious songs into Marathi. Further, Hebrew was established by the efforts of Bene Israel community as a recognized second language of study from the matriculation level to the university level in Bombay University with a chair for Hebrew Studies. Prominent Bene Israel functioned as teachers who taught from books written by Bene Israel scholars and were examined by other Bene Israel scholars as examiners. How many universities in towns/countries with significant Jewish populations could boast of having a recognized centre for the teaching and learning of Hebrew in days prior to the establishment of the State of Israel? Note the Hebrew course in Bombay University was taught from about 1870 till 1997 when it was stopped because of lack of students. It should be noted that Hebrew was established as a course even before Herzl even dreamt about establishing a land for the Jews.

Besides the fact that India and Hinduism are a very tolerant nation, religion and culture, the question of how the Bene Israel community was able to maintain their identity through the observance of the barest minimum of biblical first temple period Jewish traditions and customs has always been an intriguing one.

To all casual observers Judaism and Hinduism appear to be fundamentally different religions. But, having been exposed and re-exposed to both Jewish culture as practiced in Israel and Hindu culture as practiced in India, the author would like to record a few of his observations on this subject. It should appear that Judaism is a monotheistic religion and Hinduism is a "pantheistic religion and so quite different. This concept of Hinduism was promoted and propagated by the Christians and Islam in order to further their own missionary goals. The Hindu concept of God is monotheistic as they are the ones who originated the concept of reuniting with the Holy Spirit after death if one leads a good clean life on earth. It is only the explanation of God that changes in order to enable the nine

different intellectual levels of the population comprehend the infinite nature of the Supreme Being. The Memorandum of Understanding signed by Rabbi Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel and the learned Acharya and Sankaracharyas of Hinduism is evidence of the Jewish religion accepting this fact. It should be noted that even Judaism has three levels of explaining the concept of God to its followers.

A review of the similarities of religious practices and customs between the two major religions could, in the opinion of the author, explain why the Bene Israel community was able to maintain their links to Judaism and survive as an entity in India. The Bene Israel community was able to maintain their religious and cultural identity through their observance and practice of pure and traditional biblical/pre and first temple form of Judaism. Because the customs, rituals, traditions, social values and practice of both Judaism and Hinduism as such are so similar, that there did not arise any question directly or indirectly of adulterated traditions, customs, observance and rituals in the practice of traditional Judaism, by copying Hindu religious practices and customs. Further, the pragmatics of the local environment and the ready availability of raw materials for the ritualistic observance of any religion have always influenced the practice of a religion when exposed to another religion or culture. This is why, even today in Israel every festival though spiritually following the guidelines of Judaism are ritualistically celebrated in so many different ways depending upon the country of origin of that Jewish community. See the attached Memorandum of Understanding signed between the leadership of the Hindu and Jewish leaders represented by Chief Rabbi Metzger and his delegation from Israel and the leaders of the Bene Israel community in New Delhi, India (the author is a signatory to this historic document) in 2007 shown at the end of this article.

Observations:

- 1.0 The Jewish and the Hindu calendars are both lunar calendars. A month in both calendars is from new moon to new moon. Both calendars have been adjusted to suit the agricultural seasons of the areas in which the two religions developed.
- 2.0 Coincidentally, both calendars have approximately the same number of years from their inception.
- 3.0 Both calendars, once in three years have a thirteenth month, though not in the same year.
- 4.0 A revolutionary concept like instituting the seventh day (sanctifying it as a Sabbath) as a day of rest could only have evolved in an environment where people tended to work all week. Hindus even today do not have a sanctified day of rest in any part of the week.
- 5.0 Coincidentally, both the religions have festivals of similar types and background reasons, occurring very close to each other at similar times in the year.
- 6.0 Take the case of Yom Kippur in the Jewish calendar and Durga Puja in the Hindu calendar as the fulcrum point, since they both fall nearly on the same day, "Day A". This day in the Jewish religion is a day of fast, rest, no work and atonement. Among the Hindus it is a day of prayer and fast and artisans who particularly worked in precious metals do not work.
- 7.0 The new moon prior to "Day A" is the Jewish New Year followed by three weeks of festive period culminating in Succoth. If there is no influence of the Hindu leap year, then the new moon following "Day A" is the Hindu festival of Deepavali (Diwali) preceded by three weeks of festive period starting with Dussera. In the Hindu leap year the festivals are shifted by one month.
- 8.0 The full moon in January sees the Hindu festival of Sankrant related to a miracle which happened under a tree. Except in the Jewish and or Hindu leap year, the Jews observe Tu-Bishvat (The New Year of trees) on the same day. Though the festive significance of Tu-Bishvat may have been given importance and significance only very recently.
- 9.0 On the same day both the Jews and Hindus observe Purim and Holi. The basic significance in both religions being a story related to the triumph of good over evil. Further, both festivals are celebrated by the Hindus and Jews on two different days; "Normal Holi" or "Purim" for the general population and "Chota Holi" or "Shoshan Purim" for those living in walled cities. Both religions give special importance to the roll of women in their societies on the festive occasion.
- 10.0 Again the Jewish festival of Pessach (Passover Second New Year) also observed as a second New Year by the Hindus and called "Pessachi, Vaisachi" depending upon the regional language in India, fall on approximately the same day.
- 11.0 Both the Jews and the Hindus perform their marriage rites under a canopy. Further, both marriages are solemnized by the presence of witnesses. The Jewish marriage on the other hand also has a marriage contract which in addition defines the post marital compensation of the bride.
- 12.0 Both the Jews and the Hindus wear an undergarment with fringes/strings on the sides.
- 13.0 Both Hindus and Jews are required to remove their sandals when entering a temple or synagogue.
- 14.0 Both Hindus and Jews fast as a form of penance and at one time the Jews used to apply ash on their body on such an occasion just as is done by the Hindus till today.
- 15.0 Both the Jews and Hindus attach significance to ritual baths particularly prior to special occasions.
- 16.0 Both religions give importance to a Holy River: the River Jordan amongst the Jews and the River Ganges amongst the Hindus.

- 17.0 Both religions require the isolation of women during the days of the menstrual period and after childbirth. Specifically, 40 days for a male child and 80 days for a female child.
- 18.0 The concept of auspicious and inauspicious days for weddings and special functions is common to both religions and are generally observed on similar periods/times during the year.
- 19.0 Prior to the Jewish Yom Kippur the Jews as per their custom are supposed to prepare a solet based preparation; the Hindus also at this time of the year make a solet based preparation. The Bene Israel call it puri (a sweet mixture of solet, dried fruits, etc in a dough wrapping).and this preparation is unique to the Bene Israel even though similar preparations are made by other communities.
- 20.0 The many ritual articles of home Kiddush service or festival offerings of Jewish festivals are very similar to those used by the Hindus in their Puja. Starting with the blessing and the lighting of an oil lamp (later a candle amongst Jews).
- 21.0 The First Commandment of the Ten Commandments is "I am the Lord". One of the basic tenets of Hinduism is "Ahm Brahma" "I am the Creator" where Brahma is the Lord of Creation and he is the Supreme One in the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
22. The Hebrew name of God is "יהוה", which could be originated graphically from (Note: Hebrew is read from right to left)
- 22.1 "י" signifying the head and neck
- 22.2 "ה" signifying the hands; where the right hand is more powerful than the left one.
- 22.3 "ו" signifying the body
- 22.4 "ה" signifying the legs; where the right leg is more powerful than the left leg.
- 22.5 The overall implication being that God made man in his own image.
- 23.0 On the other hand, one sees that the name of God is made up of two parts "י" signifying the male organ and the Hebrew word for woman "ה" which is the same spelt forwards and backwards, implying that creation process is initiated by the unification of the two. Reversing the name of God results in "יה" male and "הי" female and Life.
- 24.0 A further interpretation of the Holy Name signifying the Creation Process is the male organ
- "י" between the legs "ה" results in a baby (body "ו" from between the legs "ה").
- 25.0 The Hebrew prayer "Adonai (pronounced as Adonai written as -Yahweh) Malek, Adonai Malack, Adonai Imlok Le OlamVaed" meaning the Process of Creation (God

the Creator) was there, The Process of Creation (God the Creator) is there, and the Process of Creation (God the Creator) will be there For Ever and Ever. This is very similar to the Hindu concept, a Continuing Renewal or Continuing Creation Process.

26. Now the author would like to draw one's attention to Sanskrit, the Holy language of the Hindus. Where "Om" written as

"ॐ" is the name of God where.

"◌" the half moon with the dot in the centre signifies the woman's breast,

"३" signifies the woman lying down with her legs up, and the

"ॐ" part signifies the male organ.

As a whole signifying that God is embodied in the Creation Process.

- 27.0 From the above, one observes a distinct similarity in the concept of and the philosophical reasoning in the evolution of the name of God in the two religions.

- 28.0 On March 2001, the author was witness to the Hindu funeral rites of the father of a close friend. Several features of the ceremonial rites bore immense similarity to the Jewish funeral rites as practiced in Israel. The body was brought on the shoulders of relatives and friends as pall-bearers. At the entrance to the crematorium the body was laid down in the last rites hall where prayers and ceremonies were performed. Then the body was taken to the funeral pyre area, where the eldest and other sons performed the last prayers and lit the fire. In Judaism the sons read the Kaddish and throw the first mud. After the ceremony the mourning family assembled at the exit gate for receiving the condolences. After that the mourners met at the house of the deceased for further meditation and prayer services, very similar to those in Judaism.

- 29.0 But the most impressive item was a writing on the wall, at the entrance to the funeral pyre area in Sanskrit "KO AH HUM"- which means "Who am I". On the other side on the wall was the answer in Sanskrit

"SO AH HUM" which means "I am that I am".

Now everyone who has read the Bible knows the story of the encounter between God and Moses on Mount Sinai at the site of the Burning Bush, when Moses asked God, "And who shall I say sent me (to the children of Israel in bondage in the land of Egypt)" and the response of God was tell them that "I am that I am" has sent you. This identical description of the omnipresent in both religions (in my opinion) is not just a coincidence but an indication that the origins of Jewish religious philosophy had deep roots in the religious philosophy of ancient Hinduism.

NB. It should be significantly noted that God in this encounter does not declare to Moses "His Name" in Jewish terminology but, as "I am a very universal all encompassing, indefinable being; yet later when Moses brought the Jews out of bondage to Mount Sinai to worship God, that's when God declares to the people on the Ten Commandment Tablets, a specific "Name".

30.0 It has been brought to our attention by Mrs. Noreen Daniel that certain passages from the Book of Psalms in the Bible are exactly the same or very similar to passages from certain Mantras and Slokas in Sanskrit. The author has not been able to verify this as yet and would be grateful for inputs on this subject.

31.0 During a recent discussion it has been brought to the attention of the author by Mr. Simon Menachem Kolet of Israel that in the Bible in the Book of Genesis Chapter 41 verse 45 Joseph was given the name/title by Pharaoh - "Sapnath Paneah" where Egyptologists have explained the title as being related to his new position "Food man" and "Paneah" meaning "of life" i.e. "Chief Steward in the Realm in the Face of Famine."

Noting that Joseph had a past history and record of interpreting dreams, this seems to be an unlikely explanation. On the other hand in Sanskrit and several Indian languages Sapna means Dream and Paneah in Hebrew means "Interpreter or Analyzer". So in view of Joseph's past it appears more likely that the new title given to Joseph was "Dream Interpreter". In modern Hebrew the term means Encryption Decoder or Decipherer.

32.0 According to the Bible when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he found the Israelites worshipping a "Golden Calf". Now it is definitely known that Cow Worship has been unique to India/Hinduism and not to the culture of the land of Egypt, from which, they were supposed to have come.

33.0 Hinduism though a monotheistic religion is considered by most persons to be the religion of idol worshipers, but this is a grave misconception propagated by the supposed monotheists in their desire to propagate their own brand of religion. Hindus have always been firm believers in one God and in achieving unity of the soul with God by leading a good and pure life.

34.0 Shown here is a memorandum of understanding signed by the Ex-Chief Rabbi of Israel and his team and the Hindu Acharyas and Shankarias at the Inter Religion Conference in New Delhi, India, agreeing that both Hinduism and Judaism are monotheistic religions.

However, in order to permit the explanation of the concept of God to persons of various intellectual levels : in the general population, they classified and stratified the understanding and worship of God into nine forms/levels. The purpose of

Similarities between Hinduism and Judaism
A memorandum signed in New Delhi acknowledging the fact that both Hinduism and Judaism are monotheistic religions

Hinduism
signatories

Sankararias and
Acharyas of
Hinduism

Judaism
signatories

Chief Rabbi and
other Rabbis of
the Rabbinate in
Jerusalem



Note: Additionally the signatories include both Hindu and Jewish witnesses to this solemn event including Rabbi Abraham Benjamin, a Bene Israel Rabbi

this was the generation of a medium for concentration on the Holy Being as per the intellectual capability and the mental development of the given strata of the population. Now since the majority of the population, were using idols as the medium for focusing their concentration during worship, the general misconception developed (which was enthusiastically promoted by the monotheists) that Hindus were idol worshipers. That is tantamount to saying that because the Christians have statues of Jesus and Mary along with the crucifix in their churches and offer prayers through them, that they are idol worshippers. This is known to be untrue.

The Jews themselves have three forms/levels of worship excluding the use of images or idols.

Form-1: Monistic Form - Where God is all encompassing, infinite, indefinable, supreme and definitely as per the tenets of the Ten-Commandments.

Form-2: Monotheistic Form - Where a mental image is created of the unity of God the Supreme Being, with a multitude of known abstract human qualities to cater to the intellectual understanding of a certain level of the population and that is the form of worship used in much of the liturgy.

Form-3: The use of the Heichal with the emplacement of the Torah as the focal point of religious worship and as the medium of concentration upon God. But, still in line with the Mosaic concept that, it is the thought in the Torah that is important and not the form. See comment below.

N.B.: It should be noted that the cabinet (Heichal) for the Torah is very similar in form to the enclosure used by the Hindus to place their idols. The Hindus have another six levels of worship in order to encompass as broad a spectrum of intellectual levels of the general population. This occurs within the framework of a single humane tolerant religion which emphasizes the feasibility of the soul achieving unity with God by leading a good and pure life.

Why the Bene Israel community was able to survive?

N.B.: The Christians have four forms of worship, three as in Judaism and the fourth is the form including the statues of Jesus and/or Mary as the focal point for concentration during prayers.

The author would like the readers to consider the fact that when Moses, brought down the Ten Commandments from the mount, they were written on stone or marble and not on papyrus or clay tablets as was the practice at that time in several cultures.

(N.B.: The Torah scrolls were later written on parchment paper.) This was the medium prevalent for the dissemination of information and thought in Egypt. The reason for writing the Ten Commandments on stone or marble was to establish permanency and perpetuity. The main reason in the opinion of the author was to establish the fact that in Judaism it is not the Form that is important

(symbolic of idols even if it is as bright and beautiful and cast in gold as the golden calf) but the Thought/Mind/Intellect.

N.B.: In Judaic thought the importance given to the Mind, Thought and Intellect is again highlighted in the selection of the first two kings of Israel. Both kings were selected and anointed by Samuel the prophet. Saul, was selected as king, based upon his physical form specifically his height. Then, later David was selected as king, for his intellect, cleverness, bravery, cunning and character. Wisdom, cleverness and intellect are each highlighted as superior attributes in the succession of King Solomon to the Throne of David.

The Jewish Mezuzah case has an extraordinary similarity to the "Firman" or message case used in ancient times for the distribution of royal messages. The Bene Israel household had a special form.

Similarities between Hinduism and Judaism

Hinduism

Judaism



The Oriental farman holder or casket - for messages sent by kings - is an integral part of Oriental/Indian culture.

The Jewish Mezuzah is a derivative of the farman holder - holder of the message of God as is the Megilah holder.



Original Bene Israel Mezuzah (an item shown in the Diaspora Museum) and a recent gold plated replica presented by Raphael Jhirad Ex-Director of Ort Polytechnic to the Moses Family (Collection of Nissim Moses). The gold plated mezuzah is a replica made recently for the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the Old Synagogue- "Shaar-E-Rahamim"



Bene Israel mezuzah



A silver mezuzah (replica of the original Bene Israel bronze mezuzah) created for the 200th anniversary of the Shaar-E-Rahamim Synagogue of Bombay. From the Collection of Nissim Moses

35.0 The original name of Abraham was Avram – Is it possible that this name has links to Av Ram - Father Ram (Hindu God) or Ram himself.

N.B.: In Hindu mythology (the Mahabharata) there exists the story of Balram the brother of Lord Krishna who goes towards the west and establishes a monotheistic school of thought like Abraham.

36.0 The holy book of the Hindus – a book of knowledge is the Vedas – this in Hebrew may be derived from “Ve Ida” and you shall know, in Sanskrit knowledge means “Vidya”.

37.0 The second Hindu religious book, the Mahabharata – literally means Great India. Though it has nothing to do with Great India it is a ballad relating the happenings as a result of a war between a small good group (Pandavas) and a big bad group (Corowas). Breaking up the word Mahabharata into Hebrew syllables one could get two sources : Ma Barata - what did you create? Or “Ma-Ba-Ra-Ta” – what happened (came) as a result of an evil group/cell.

38.0 During the exodus from the land of bondage the Israelites marked the door-post of their homes with red (blood or color); on every Hindu house, there is a red sign marking, to signify a Hindu home.

39.0 The six - pointed star, “Magen David” is also a sacred Hindu symbol. Often it has inserted into it the word “Ma” implying mother or source or creator. A deity as sacred as “God” among the Hindus. The Jews on the other hand often insert the word “יהוה” or “יה” again meaning, as explained earlier, Creator or two letters from there meaning Life.



A typical decorative Magen David symbol marble handcrafted inlay work with semi-precious stones

40.0 Both religions give importance to lamp holders of multiple lights. In Hinduism one sees the panch diya and saat diya (five light and seven light lamp holders) and in Judaism one sees the seven lamp or candle holder or menorah and the nine lamp or candle holder or Hannukiah.

Similarities between Hinduism and Judaism

Nissim Moses

Founder President - Bene Israel Heritage Museum & Genealogical Research Centre

Hinduism

Judaism



Importance is given in both religions to multiple lamp holders. In Hinduism one has the panch, saat and nau divya lamp holders. In Judaism one has the two-lamp Shabbath lamp holder, the seven-lamp Menorah and the nine-lamp Hanukkah.



Five-lamp silver Diya



Seven-lamp brass Diya



Star-shaped, seven oil lamps - Menorah



Nine oil-lamp holder - Hanukkah

Similarities between Hinduism and Judaism

Hinduism

Ram is a formidable person in Hindu mythology. Further, there was a person Balram, the brother of the Hindu God Krishna who went West and established a monotheistic religion.



The Temple at Thanjavur, India built by the great Raja Raja Chola

Judaism

The original name of Abraham was "Av Ram" – Father Ram or Father of Ram. Observe the similarity in design of Hindu Temple and the Second Temple in Jerusalem.



Photo from the second temple model by Michael Onis from Kedumim.

Both Hinduism and Judaism refrain from three lamp holders. On the other hand seven is an auspicious number.

- 41.0 All Jewish synagogues, the world over face Jerusalem, but the temple in Jerusalem is built facing the south, with the entrance from the south wall. Now if one were to review, the guidelines along which the temple in Jerusalem was constructed and compare the guidelines for building a Hindu temple one would notice a distinct correlation between the spatial, structural, engineering and architectural elements of the two structures.
- 42.0 Both religions have prayers of thanks for the Moon, Sun (once in 28 years), the Harvest, the Sea, for Rain and other natural phenomena.
- 44.0 It does appear very strangely and coincidental that parallel to the five holy books of the Vedas and the Upanishads that there are the five books of Moses in the Torah.
- 45.0 Even the story of the Exodus of the Israelites from the Land of Bondage as given in the Bible is open to question as many things mentioned therein, do not have any rational explanation. For example the parting of the Red Sea, the time taken by the 60,000 families of the Israelites to cross the Red Sea do not make logical sense of the situation. Some years ago while in the USA the author was traveling with a friend along the Erie Canal when he was asked why the towns on the road route were all 10 miles or so apart. Not knowing the answer the friend replied these were all wagon train route stops for resting and change of horses and replenishment of food stock for the pioneers going west. This journey of 10 miles would take them one day. This fact struck a note with the author as to how long did the 600,000 or so Israelites take to cross a path

of dry land the width of the Red Sea. The answer as per the author's rough calculations was about 23 days. The Question are, was the Red Sea parted for 23 days or did Moses stand on the banks of the Red Sea holding the sea apart for 23 days ?

Both scenarios appear to be quite impossible. The next questions are, then what did happen? Where did the event occur? Where did the Exodus actually occur? What was the route that was taken by the Israelites to the promised land? How does the route correlate to the events described in the Bible? And so on. There is an apparently logical explanation for all these questions assuming that the land of the start of the exodus lay somewhere to the East of the Indus River which has four tributaries in the Kashmir Valley and long considered in ancient times to be the location of the Garden of Eden. Then across the Indus River, a body of water that breaks up into lakes with wide land crossings in the non Monsoon and dry season and into a torrential broad and deep river that looks like a sea drowning all people in its flash flood path. Then one enters the land of Sind, a land of rich marble deposits and stone, the land of the Ancient Civilizations of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. This was the land of the origin of cow worship, and the start of the great desert to the west passing through the land of the Amalekites (now Persia or Iran) ending on the eastern banks of the Jordan River. The desert that led to Jericho and the entry of the Israelites, into the land of Canaan, from the east. This was the same route taken by Alexander the Great a thousand plus years later on his return journey from India to Persepolis in Babylon. Alexander being a great general would never have risked his army to the ravages of the desert if he did not have positive information that another large body of people had taken that southern route westward -i.e. probably the Israelites returning to the land of Canaan (now Israel).

Method: On a heated pan fry in oil the mustard seeds, garlic and ginger then put in the onions and continue frying till onions are light pink in color. Then add the potato to the frying pan and continue to fry and mix well. Finally add the salt and turmeric powder, mix well and continue to heat for about 5 minutes on high heat. Then cover the frying pan and continue till cooked on slow fire for about 20-30 minutes. Finally, just before removing from the fire add the coriander leaves. After removing from the fire mash the potato with a masher.

Preparation of Dough

1-2-cups wheat flour

pinch of salt

1 tablespoon oil

Mix these well and then add some water and make dough.

Keep for about 30 minutes.

Then make balls of about 5 cm diameter.

Preparation of Paratha

Mold the balls into cups and add the filling into the cups and close properly. Then flatten it into a flat round chapati like bread not too thin.

Fry on a hot dry frying pan (tava) till it is cooked. Do not burn. Once in a while pour a little oil on the side of the bread while in the pan when it is being cooked. Before baking the next paratha wipe the frying pan (tava) clean with dry kitchen paper. When cooked take off and keep in a closed cloth packet. Eat while hot.

For mince all the process remains the same except that the potato filling is replaced by mince filling.

THE CELEBRATION OF PURIM BY THE BENE ISRAEL

The Hindu and Jewish calendar both being solar-lunar calendars are very similar in their characteristics. Further, coincidentally both communities have similar religious festivals with very similar significance and background reasoning on approximately the same dates except in that year when each of the calendars has a leap year, then the festivals are separated by exactly one lunar month. Hence when the Bene Israel were introduced to the Festival of Purim (since this festival/event, though known to them was instituted centuries after the ancestors of the Bene Israel had left the land of Israel) it was nothing new to them. The reason being, that exactly on the same day the Hindu community have a festival known as Holi, not only that, but the background story is very similar - Triumph of Good over Evil - the Hindus burn an effigy of Holika and the Jews burn an effigy of Haman. There are two days of Purim the second day being called Shoshan Purim celebrated in a walled city. The Hindus

have Chota Holi celebrated in a walled city. On Purim the Jews bestow special honor to Esther a woman, who saved the Jews, the Hindus give special honor to women. Both festivals are celebrated in quite a boisterous manner each according to their communal traditions. Hence the festival of Purim was for the Bene Israel community a welcome festival for celebration.

The festival of Purim falls on "ד" of Adar and Shoshan Purim falling a day later on "טו" of Adar.

On Erev Purim the Megilah of Esther is read in the Synagogue where the congregation makes a lot of noise every time the name of Haman is read out. See pictures below of the congregation of the Judah Hyam Synagogue celebrating Purim in the year 2007 in the presence of his Excellency the Israeli Ambassador Mr. David Danieli and an exquisite Megilath Esther designed by Ms. Siona Benjamin.



The Last Purim of Beatrice Moses on 3rd March, 2007
Beatrice passed away on 8th March, 2007



During the festivities Purim songs are sung but the Bene Israel community has a special song called "Purim Purim" with a special tune. The words in Hebrew are given alongside.